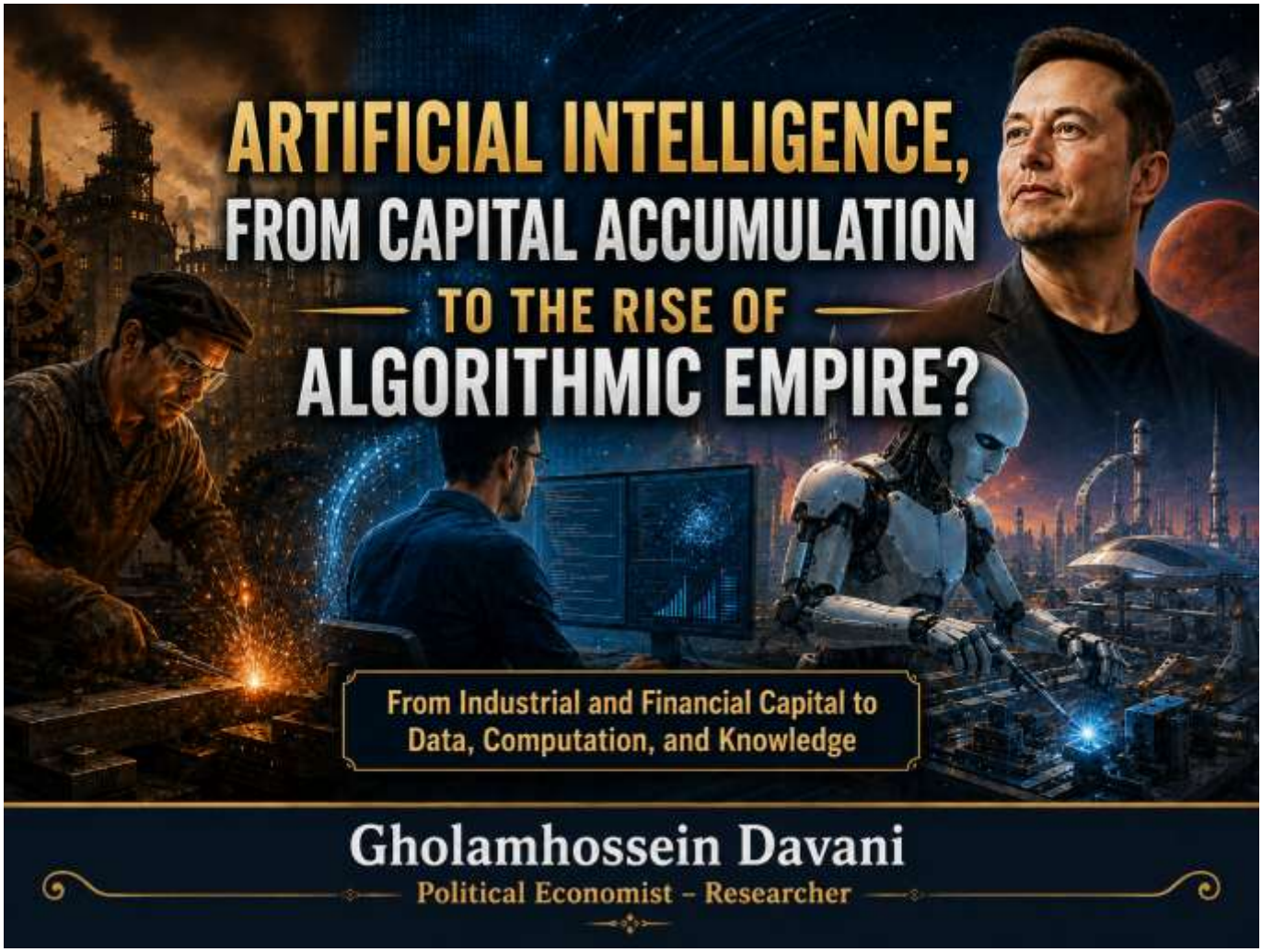

Artificial Intelligence: A Transition Beyond Capitalism or the Emergence of "Algorithmic Empire "?

From Industrial and Financial Capital to the Monopoly of Data, Computation, and Knowledge

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Abstract

The emergence of artificial intelligence, especially generative AI, is not merely a technological revolution. It has the potential to transform relations between labor and capital, the concept of ownership, market structure, income distribution, modes of production, the power of transnational corporations, and even the meaning of national sovereignty. The fundamental political-economic question of the twenty-first century is whether AI will carry capitalism into a new stage, create the material conditions for a transition to some form of post-capitalist system, or, on the contrary, lead to an unprecedented concentration of economic power and the emergence of a new form of global domination.

Contemporary literature offers at least several major interpretations of this transformation: platform capitalism, technofeudalism, data colonialism, digital colonialism, AI capitalism, and post-capitalist theories based on automation. Within the Marxist tradition, researchers such as Nick Dyer-Witheford, James Steinhoff, and Christian Fuchs have examined AI in relation to value theory, labor, fixed capital, monopoly, and imperialism [1-5].

Recent data from UNCTAD, OECD, ILO, and the IMF also show that AI is developing under conditions of high economic concentration in critical parts of its value chain - from equipment for semiconductor production and advanced chip fabrication to GPUs, cloud infrastructure, and research and development [6-9].

This article argues that there is still insufficient evidence to declare the end of capitalism. On the contrary, current trends point more strongly toward the emergence of a concentrated form of algorithmic capitalism. Yet if ownership and control of data, chips, computing power, cloud infrastructure, algorithms, and AI models become instruments of economic and cognitive dependence for other societies, a new form of domination can be imagined. This article refers to that possibility as "algorithmic imperialism."

The term is not yet a settled theory or an academic consensus. It is presented here as an analytical hypothesis that combines classical theories of imperialism and ultra-imperialism with corporatocracy, platform capitalism, data colonialism, and the political economy of artificial intelligence.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, capitalism, Marx, imperialism, ultra-imperialism, corporatocracy, platform capitalism, technofeudalism, data colonialism, digital colonialism, algorithmic capital, algorithmic imperialism.

1. Introduction: Are We Facing a Technological Revolution or a Transformation of the Economic System?

The history of capitalism can, to a large extent, be understood as a history of the coexistence of capital and technology.

The steam engine, railways, electricity, the internal-combustion engine, assembly lines, telecommunications, computers, and the internet each changed not only the instruments of production but also the way the economy and society were organized. The first Industrial Revolution mechanized human physical power. The computer automated part of computational activity, and the internet reduced the cost of transmitting information.

Artificial intelligence, however, has entered a domain that until recently was regarded as predominantly human: the production and processing of cognition. AI can now write, translate, program, generate images and video, analyze data, review legal contracts, prepare financial reports, assist in medical diagnosis, support scientific research, and perform part of the work of specialists and managers.

In a 2025 study, the International Labour Organization estimated that roughly one in four workers worldwide is employed in an occupation in which at least some tasks are exposed to generative AI. At the same time, the ILO emphasizes that, under present conditions, the transformation of jobs is more likely than the complete elimination of most occupations [8].

This development raises a historical question: if machines can replace not only part of human physical power but also a growing share of human mental labor, how will the relationship among work, wages, capital, and ownership change? And, more importantly, if the instruments of this revolution are owned by a small number of companies, will the result be liberation from work or an unprecedented concentration of wealth and power?

2. Capitalism and the Ownership of the Means of Production

In Marx's analysis, capitalism is not merely a market system; it is a social relation in which ownership of the means of production is separated from labor power [10].

The worker sells labor power in order to live, while the owner of capital controls the means required for production. In nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, these means largely consisted of land + factory + machinery + money capital. In the twentieth century, additional elements were added: banks + capital markets + joint-stock companies + intellectual property + distribution networks. In contemporary digital capitalism, platforms + networks + software + data have also become sources of economic power [11].

In the age of AI, an even more complex configuration has emerged: data + chips + compute + data centers + cloud infrastructure + algorithms + foundation models + user networks. The classical question, "Who owns the factory?" has therefore not disappeared, but new questions have been added: Who owns the data? Who controls the chips? Who controls computing power? Who trains the model? Who determines the algorithm? And ultimately, who turns humanity's collective knowledge into private capital?

3. Marx, Machinery, and the Question of Artificial Intelligence

Marx obviously did not know artificial intelligence, but machinery and the role of technology in capitalism occupy an important place in his work [10].

From the capitalist's point of view, machinery is a tool for increasing productivity. If a machine allows two workers to do what previously required ten, production costs fall. At the level of an individual firm, this is rational. At the level of the economic system as a whole, however, the issue becomes more complex, because machinery raises productivity while potentially reducing the need for living labor.

Artificial intelligence can extend this contradiction into cognitive labor. In the past, many educated professionals were assumed to be relatively protected from automation. Now accountants, lawyers, translators, programmers, analysts, designers, writers, and researchers also face forms of task automation.

4. Does an Intelligent Machine Produce "Value"?

This is one of the most important theoretical disputes between Marxist political economy and some newer interpretations of AI. Under the classical reading of Marx's labor theory of value, a machine is not an independent source of newly created value; rather, it transfers to the product the value previously embodied in it [10].

Fenglin Zhang directly examined this question in the age of artificial intelligence in a 2026 article in Humanities and Social Sciences Communications [12].

His theoretical conclusion is clear: AI should be regarded as fixed capital, or as an advanced form of "dead labor," rather than as an independent labor force that creates new value. From this perspective, AI can greatly increase human labor productivity and create the conditions for higher relative surplus value, but within Marxist value theory, "living labor" remains the source of new value [12].

A major contradiction appears here. Capital needs labor in order to produce value, yet each individual capitalist constantly tries to reduce dependence on labor. Artificial intelligence can raise this historical contradiction to a new level.

5. From Industrial Capital to Finance Capital

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Marxist theorist Rudolf Hilferding analyzed the concentration of capital, the growth of banks, and the fusion of banking and industrial capital in his book Finance Capital [13].

Capital concentration meant that small enterprises in many industries increasingly gave way to large corporations, trusts, and cartels. With the expansion of the joint-stock company, banking, and stock exchanges, capital ownership moved beyond direct ownership of the factory. The combination of industrial capital + banks + capital markets gradually produced a more complex structure of economic power. This transformation became a foundation for many later theories of imperialism.

6. Lenin and Monopoly Capitalism

In Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Lenin identified five major characteristics:

1. Concentration of production and capital and the emergence of monopolies;

2. The fusion of banking and industrial capital and the formation of finance capital;

3. The growing importance of the export of capital;

4. The formation of international monopolistic associations;

5. The division of the world among the great powers [14].

For Lenin, the most important economic transformation was the movement from free competition toward monopoly [14].

If monopoly theory is taken out of the historical conditions of 1916 and brought into 2026, a new question appears: what do today's strategic monopolies control? Not only oil, banks, or steel. The list must now include chips + data + cloud infrastructure + compute + algorithms + foundation models.

7. Kautsky and the Theory of Ultra-Imperialism

Karl Kautsky, one of the early leading figures of European Marxism, introduced the concept of "Ultra-Imperialism" in 1914 [15].

He raised the possibility that large capitals and imperial powers might, instead of engaging in permanent war and rivalry, form at some stage a type of international cooperation or cartel for the joint exploitation of the world [15].

Lenin rejected this interpretation, arguing that uneven capitalist development and constant shifts in economic power made such a stable alliance unlikely [14].

Kautsky's debate becomes interesting again in the age of technology corporations. Major AI companies are simultaneously competitors and deeply dependent on one another. A company may use another company's chips, rent another company's cloud infrastructure, invest in an AI company, embed that company's model in its own products, and at the same time compete with it in another market. The AI economy therefore combines competition + cooperation + cross-investment + infrastructural dependence.

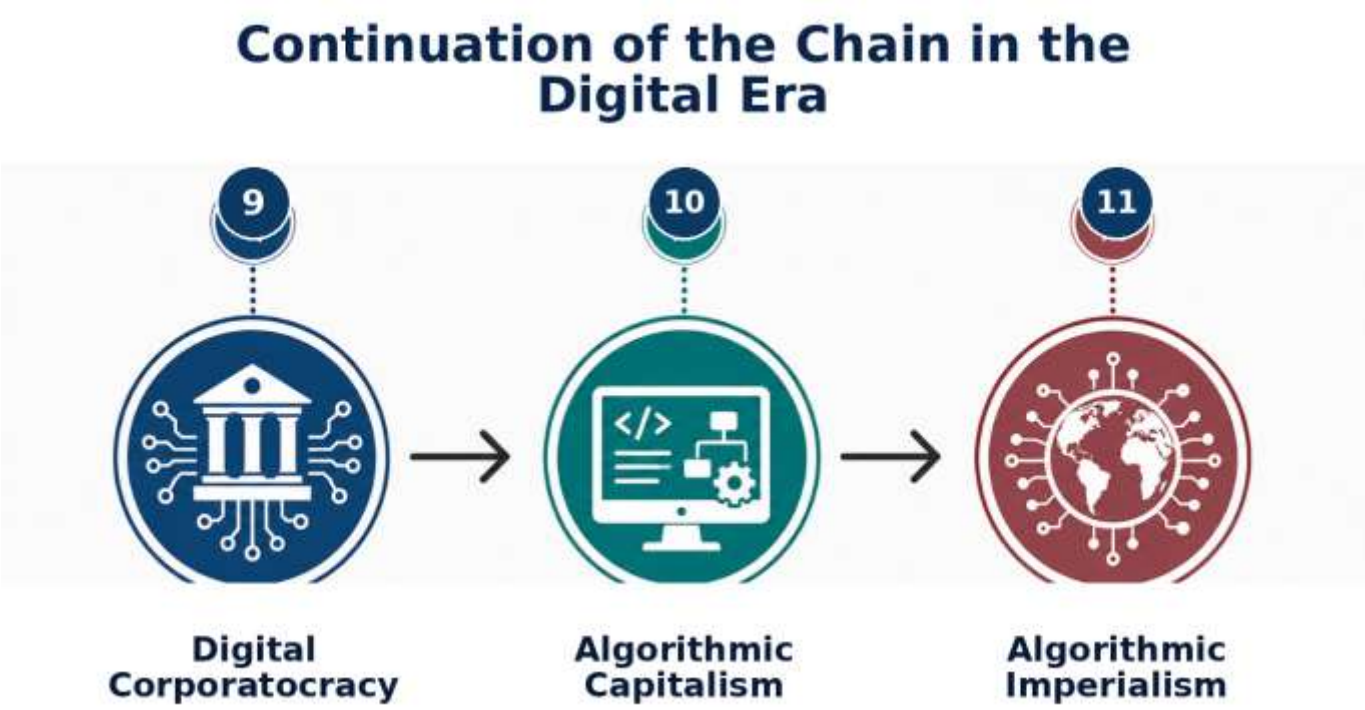
This condition restates Kautsky's historical question about the possibility of a "transnational cartel of large capitals" in a new form.

8. From Empire to Corporatocracy

In Gholamhossein Davani's book Empire. Imperialism. Ultra-Imperialism and Corporatocracy, published in 2025 and available through Amazon, the historical transformation of empires, the role of companies in colonialism, the formation of joint-stock companies, the rise of stock exchanges, the decline of traditional empires, and the transition to imperialism are examined [16].

The importance of this framework for the present discussion lies in the connection between political power and the changing organizational form of capital. The historical path can be presented in simplified form as follows:

Under present conditions, it appears that this chain may continue in the digital era through three additional stages:



These final three stages are concepts proposed in this article. They should not be attributed directly to Davani's book; rather, they are an extension of the historical framework examined in that work.

9. What Is Corporatocracy?

Corporatocracy can be understood as a condition in which the power of large corporations extends beyond the marketplace. At this stage, a corporation no longer operates only in markets; it may also influence laws, tax policy, trade, regulation, media, political lobbying, technical standards, and public policy. The boundary between economic power and political power therefore gradually becomes less distinct [16].

In the age of artificial intelligence, an even more complex form of this power can be imagined. An AI company may supply not only a commodity, but part of society's public knowledge infrastructure.

10. Platform Capitalism: The Company Becomes the Owner of the Market

Nick Srnicek uses the concept of Platform Capitalism to explain the new business model of digital firms [11].

Unlike the traditional factory, a platform does not merely produce a commodity. It can attract sellers and buyers, collect data from both sides, determine the rules of exchange, control ranking algorithms, sell advertising, and even enter the same market itself.

Srnicek emphasizes that the platform model has a permanent appetite for more data and larger networks [11]. As a result, an important change occurs: in the classical economy, firms competed inside a market; in the platform economy, a private company may own the market space itself.

11. From Platforms to Artificial Intelligence

AI takes this process one step further. Under platform capitalism:

Human beings produce data -> the platform collects the data -> the data are commercialized.

Under AI capitalism:

Human beings produce knowledge and data -> the data are used to train a model -> the model gains the ability to perform part of the same human work -> the service produced by the model is sold in the market.

This cycle creates a major question about the ownership of knowledge.

12. Humanity's Collective Knowledge and the Private Ownership of Models

AI models do not emerge from a vacuum. Behind them lies a vast accumulation of books, articles, images, computer programs, scientific knowledge, user activity, engineers' work, data-labeling labor, and both public and private investment.

In "The Nooscope Manifested," Matteo Pasquinelli and Vladan Joler analyze AI as an instrument of knowledge extractivism [5].

They describe the machine-learning production line as Data -> Algorithm -> Model and emphasize the social origin of data and the hidden human labor behind AI [5].

This leads to a central question: is socially produced knowledge, accumulated collectively over generations, now being transformed into the private property of a small number of companies?

13. Data Colonialism

Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias use the concept of Data Colonialism [17].

In their view, data are not like oil that simply exists in nature waiting to be extracted. Human activity must first be converted into data that can be collected, processed, and commercialized.

They compare this process with the history of colonialism and argue that data relations can turn everyday life into raw material for capital accumulation [17]. In historical colonialism, land and resources were appropriated; in data colonialism, social life and human behavior can become sources of extraction.

14. AI Capitalism from the Perspective of Marxist Researchers

One of the most important Marxist works on artificial intelligence is Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism, written by Nick Dyer-Witheford, Atle Mikkola Kjøsen, and James Steinhoff [1].

They analyze AI through concepts such as surplus value, labor, class composition, surplus population, and the general conditions of production [1]. Their conclusions are far removed from technological optimism. In their view, under the current trajectory AI can become an extremely powerful instrument in the hands of capital.

15. James Steinhoff and Capital's Control over AI

In Automation and Autonomy: Labour, Capital and Machines in the Artificial Intelligence Industry, James Steinhoff analyzes the AI industry explicitly from a Marxist perspective [2].

He challenges the assumption that information technology necessarily increases labor's independence from capital.

Steinhoff concludes that digital labor in the AI industry remains under the control of capital, and that what is sometimes described as the "autonomy of labor" may in some cases actually represent an increase in its automation [2].

This conclusion is crucial for the question of ownership: an intelligent machine is not, by itself, a capitalist. But the owner of the intelligent machine may gain greater power over labor.

16. Christian Fuchs: Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism

Across several works, Christian Fuchs has attempted to reread Marx for the analysis of the digital economy [3].

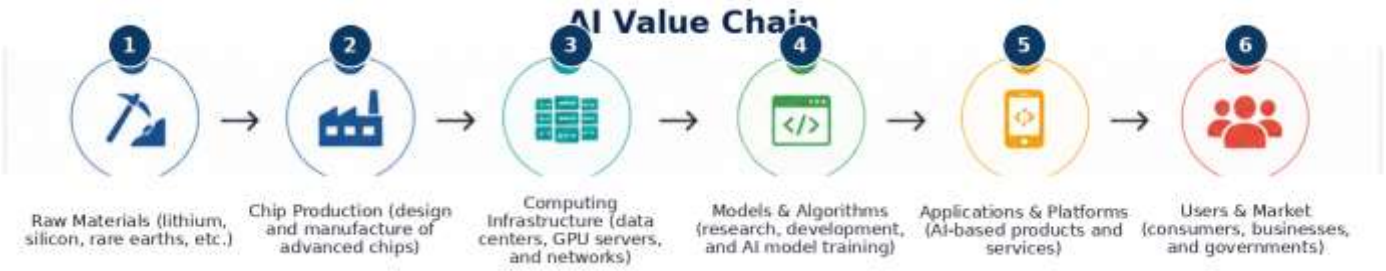
He argues that the digitalization of society does not make Marx obsolete. Rather, concepts such as machinery, capital, labor, ideology, and communication must be reread under new conditions [3].

From this perspective, technology is neither inherently emancipatory nor inherently repressive. Its social outcome depends on the relationship among ownership + power + social organization.

17. Digital Labor and Imperialism

In "Digital Labour and Imperialism," Fuchs directly connects the concept of imperialism to the international division of digital labor [4].

This perspective is central to the present article because the production of digital technology is not the product of one company or one country. The figure below illustrates this chain. Yet value, profit, and intellectual property are not distributed equally across it [4].


AI Value Chain
1
2
3
4
5
6
Raw Materials (lithium, silicon, rare earths, etc.)
Chip Production (design and manufacture of advanced chips)
Computing Infrastructure (data centers, GPU servers, and networks)
Models & Algorithms (research, development, and AI model training)
Applications & Platforms (AI-based products and services)
Users & Market (consumers, businesses, and governments)

18. The Global Division of Labor in the Age of AI

A new division of labor between center and periphery can be imagined. Peripheral countries may supply minerals, energy, cheap labor, data labeling, content moderation, consumer markets, and users' data, while technological centers control advanced chips, cloud infrastructure, foundation models, intellectual property, standards, algorithms, brands, and final profits.

In that case, the historical relationship of cheap raw materials -> expensive industrial goods may be reconstructed as cheap data and labor -> expensive algorithmic products.

19. Digital Colonialism and Developing Countries

Studies concerning Africa show that concern about "digital colonialism" is not merely an abstract concept.

In a study in Data & Policy, Aishat Salami identifies dependence on foreign digital infrastructure, asymmetric data flows, and the dominance of foreign technology companies as important elements in the debate over digital colonialism in Africa [18].

The issue is not that foreign technology provides no benefits. The question is: who owns the infrastructure, and who determines the rules under which it is used?

A country may remain politically independent while becoming deeply dependent on foreign firms for cloud infrastructure, chips, operating systems, AI, payments, and communications. This creates a new sovereignty problem: digital sovereignty.

20. AI Empire and Technocolonialism

In an article titled "AI Empire: The Rise of Technocolonialism," Mohammad Mohi Uddin examines the growth of AI in relation to the reproduction of historical inequalities in global power [19].

The article was published in November 2025 and links AI to new forms of technocolonialism [19].

This literature is important for the proposed theory of "algorithmic imperialism" because it shows that the debate over AI has moved beyond technology and productivity into the domains of power, colonialism, and geopolitics.

21. Actual Concentration in the AI Economy

The question of monopoly is not merely theoretical. In its 2025 report on AI infrastructure, the OECD reports significant concentration in several critical links of the AI chain. According to data assembled in that report, ASML in advanced lithography equipment, TSMC in advanced AI-chip fabrication, and Nvidia in GPUs used for AI each had reported shares above 80 percent in their respective segments. In addition, the three largest players in areas including HBM memory, cloud infrastructure, and EDA software together held more than 60 percent [7].

The OECD explicitly cautions that these figures do not represent formal OECD definitions of relevant competition markets and should instead be read as indications of concentration in important links of the chain [7].

That caution matters, but the overall picture is still clear: AI infrastructure is not dispersed among millions of independent producers. Important parts of it are controlled by a small number of firms.

22. Concentration of Research and Development

UNCTAD's Technology and Innovation Report 2025 shows that in 2022 only 100 companies accounted for more than 40 percent of total global business R&D investment [6].

This figure concerns business R&D as a whole, not AI alone, but it illustrates the concentration of resources required to develop frontier technologies. Among the 100 largest corporate R&D investors, no company located in a developing country other than China appeared on the list [6].

The same report estimated the AI market at $189 billion in 2023 and projected that it could reach about $4.8 trillion by 2033 [6]. If such growth occurs, control of AI will become one of the most important sources of future economic power.

23. AI and the Distribution of Benefits

The issue is not only the size of the AI economy. The more important issue is how its benefits are distributed. In a July 2026 study using actual AI-usage data from more than 100 countries, the International Monetary Fund developed two indicators to examine the value of time saved and the concentration of AI benefits [9].

Under the study's assumptions, the authors estimated the annual value of time saved - measured in terms of labor cost - at about $2.7 trillion, or 3.4 percent of the GDP of the sampled countries [9].

The authors stress that this figure is not a direct estimate of additional GDP; it is a labor-cost equivalent of the time saved.

More importantly, early AI use and benefits in many developing countries were concentrated in a relatively small group of high-income specialized occupations [9]. Technology may therefore raise productivity without necessarily distributing the gains fairly.

24. Technofeudalism: Is Capitalism Dead?

Yanis Varoufakis advances a more radical argument. In Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism?, he argues that the power of "cloud capital" and digital platforms has grown to such an extent that new economic relations have emerged with features resembling feudalism [20].

In this account, the owner of a platform resembles the owner of a territory. A seller must enter the platform owner's domain in order to reach customers. A content producer depends on the platform's algorithm in order to

be seen. Users continuously generate data through clicks and activity. As a result, corporate income may increasingly depend on a kind of "cloud rent" [20].

Yet this theory faces an important criticism: do rent, monopoly, and platforms really mean that capitalism has died, or do they indicate a much more concentrated form of the same capitalist system?

Large technology firms still hire workers, accumulate capital, issue shares, pursue profit, and compete with one another. For that reason, the term "monopoly algorithmic capitalism" may, under present conditions, be analytically more precise than announcing the end of capitalism.

25. A Completely Different Possibility: Post-Capitalism

Not all interpretations are pessimistic. In PostCapitalism, Paul Mason argues that information technology can transform the economic foundations of capitalism [21].

Information has an important property: the cost of producing the first copy can be high, while the marginal cost of reproducing subsequent copies is often extremely low. This creates tension with an economy based on scarcity and private ownership [21].

Artificial intelligence extends this logic. The cost of producing an analysis, translation, design, or computer program can fall sharply with AI. If the same process spreads into physical production through robotics, the amount of human labor required to produce many goods and services may decline substantially.

26. Fully Automated Communism?

In Fully Automated Luxury Communism, Aaron Bastani presents a radical picture of the future [22].

He argues that the combination of automation + AI + abundant energy + new technologies could eventually create the conditions for a society beyond scarcity and compulsory labor [22].

In this scenario, the purpose of technology is not to make human beings unemployed, but to free them from the necessity of working merely in order to survive.

Yet such a future requires a fundamental condition: the benefits of automation must be socialized. If the robots are owned by one percent of society, automation will not necessarily liberate the remaining 99 percent. The outcome could be precisely the opposite.

27. The Great Contradiction of Automation

Suppose a factory employs one thousand workers and AI plus robotics allow it to produce the same output with one hundred workers. For the owner, lower costs + higher productivity = a desirable outcome. But if the same process occurs in millions of firms, the incomes of a significant part of the labor force may decline. A macroeconomic question then emerges: who will buy the goods produced by the machines?

Automation can therefore create a contradiction between productive capacity and purchasing power. Possible responses include shorter working hours, a larger wage share, basic income, public services, taxes on monopoly rents, public wealth funds, cooperative ownership, or public ownership of part of the AI infrastructure.

28. The Central Issue Is Not Technology but Ownership

Two societies could possess exactly the same robots. In the first society, the robots are privately owned by a small number of capitalists, and the gains from higher productivity accrue to them.

In the second society, ownership is distributed among employees, a public fund, or society as a whole. The technology is identical, but the economic outcome is entirely different. The most important question of the AI age is therefore not simply, "What can the machine do?" The more fundamental question is: "Who owns the machine?"

29. From Corporatocracy to Algorithmic Corporatocracy

At this point, the framework developed in Davani's discussion of corporatocracy [16] can be connected to the AI economy. In the earlier industrial model, the traditional corporation controlled the factory; the bank controlled

credit; and the platform controls the digital market and data. An AI company, however, may simultaneously control: capital + cloud + compute + data + algorithms + models + platforms.

This concentration may create a new form of corporate power that can be called "algorithmic corporatocracy." The employer-employee relationship in this new platform structure, the role of production and value added within it, and the implications for Marxist analysis require much more serious attention. The central dispute between left and right is not merely whether "the market is better than the state," or which side claims to care more about ordinary people. At a deeper level, an older dispute persists: who owns resources and the means of production, who works, who decides what is produced, and who appropriates the surplus generated by work?

Although the modern terms "left" and "right" originate in the era of the French Revolution, one of the conflicts that later became a basis for that division is thousands of years old: owner and slave, lord and serf, landowner and peasant, capitalist and wage worker. The legal form of the relation has changed, but the central question has remained: who owns, and what share goes to those who produce?

Appeals to "the people" have also existed within different political traditions. Without the people, rulers cannot sustain their power; therefore governments frequently sanctify the word "people" even while subordinating the people to political power. The author expresses this polemically by invoking Machiavellian rule and the old religious image of temptation and salvation.

In slave societies, the human being could itself be an object of ownership. Under feudalism, land was the main source of wealth, and social relations were organized around ownership of land. Under industrial capitalism, machinery, factories, banks, and financial capital became centers of power. Unlike the slave, the worker was legally free, but had to sell labor power in the market in order to live. Marx emphasized precisely this transformation: the worker's legal freedom did not necessarily imply economic equality with the owner of capital.

This also helps explain why the ability to buy shares in ventures that may generate wealth far in the future matters. A person who can invest, for example, $50,000 in SpaceX does not simply possess greater present consumption capacity; that person may also purchase a claim on part of the future. If the investment succeeds, present wealth provides ownership rights over income, technology, and assets that may only be created twenty or thirty years later.

Someone whose entire income is absorbed by rent, food, and health care has not only less wealth today, but in practice also less access to opportunities to own part of the future. Inequality is therefore not only inequality in "what we have today"; it can become inequality in the appropriation of what does not yet exist. This is precisely where AI, algorithms, and space become even more important.

In industrial capitalism the question was: who owns the factory? In digital capitalism it becomes: who owns the data, the platform, the algorithm, and the network? In a future space economy, the question may become: who owns space infrastructure, extracted resources, transport routes, and the technologies for mining the Moon and asteroids?

In other words, in the twenty-first century land may cease to be humanity's most important asset, but the problem of ownership will not disappear; only the object of ownership changes. Imagine that AI can perform much of the work of accountants, programmers, drivers, translators, physicians, lawyers, and even researchers. The question is then not only whether goods become cheaper. The larger question is: who owns the robots and algorithms that perform the production?

If one million robots can perform the work of ten million people and those robots are owned by a small number of companies, society may achieve productive abundance while remaining highly unequal in ownership. A "post-scarcity economy" does not automatically solve the problem of justice. Even if the marginal cost of some goods approaches zero, ownership of the infrastructure producing those goods may remain highly concentrated.

The same applies to artificial intelligence. AI should not be understood simply as a more advanced machine. It may become a new type of productive capital - capital that, unlike the traditional industrial machine, can learn, decide, design, and substitute for part of human intellectual labor. In such a world, the future question may not be

"Who works?" but rather "Who owns what works in place of human beings?" This may be one of the most important political-economic questions of the twenty-first century.

The same logic applies to SpaceX and the space economy. If asteroid mining one day becomes economically viable, the arrival of new resources will not necessarily end distributional conflict. Humanity's mineral reserves may multiply many times over, but if extraction rights, mining technologies, transport fleets, and commercial networks are controlled by a handful of firms, natural scarcity may decline while scarcity created by property rights remains. It is therefore not enough to say that because "the pie has become larger," the division of the pie no longer matters. The question remains: who owns the factory that makes the pie?

For the same reason, criticism of inequality does not necessarily mean that "every rich person is unjust" or that "every income difference must be abolished." That is a simplified picture of the intellectual tradition of the left. From Marx to contemporary thinkers, a large part of left-wing analysis is concerned less with the absolute amount of individual wealth than with the structure of power created by ownership.

Two people might both have sufficient food, housing, health care, and even access to space travel, yet if one owns the information, energy, AI, and transport infrastructure while the other merely consumes its services, they do not occupy equal positions of social power. The question "Should justice be measured by living standards or by the distance between people?" may therefore require a third element: justice should also be evaluated through the distribution of power and ownership.

Living standards may rise for everyone while economic power becomes concentrated in the hands of a very small group. History has seen repeated changes in the legal and social form of dependence: the slave was not the same as the serf; the serf was not the same as the industrial worker; and the industrial worker is not the same as today's professional. But at every stage a common question remained: who owns the principal means of production of the age?

Yesterday it was land; later it became factories and machinery; today it includes financial capital, platforms, data, and algorithms; tomorrow it may include autonomous AI, robots, satellites, asteroid resources, and interplanetary infrastructure.

The future conflict may therefore no longer be exactly "capitalist versus worker" in the nineteenth-century sense. The central conflict may be between owners and users of algorithms, owners of robots and people displaced by robots, owners and producers of data, or owners and users of space infrastructure.

The concept of class itself may also change with the rise of artificial intelligence. The question may no longer be only who receives a higher wage, but who owns "non-human labor power." From this perspective, the historical issue from antiquity to the space age forms a continuous thread even though its outward form changes: who owns the human being, who owns the land, who owns the machine and factory, who owns capital and credit, who owns data, networks, and algorithms, who owns the thinking machine, and eventually who owns the right and capacity to exploit resources beyond Earth?

Neither "the market" nor "justice" should be turned into a religion. Markets are among the most powerful mechanisms humanity has created for price discovery, resource allocation, incentives, and innovation. Yet markets do not provide a final answer to the distribution of power generated by ownership. Likewise, if justice becomes hostility toward production, creativity, risk, and entrepreneurship, it can destroy the very resources it seeks to distribute. The fundamental question remains: whether on Earth or on Mars, who owns the future?

The most important conflict of the next century may not be over the distribution of past wealth, but over the right to appropriate wealth that has not yet been created. SpaceX shares provide a small illustration. A person with capital today can purchase a share of the space economy thirty years from now. A person without capital to risk, even if equally intelligent and hardworking, may be excluded from that ownership opportunity.

The historical dispute between left and right in the age of algorithms and space may therefore be redefined around this question: who builds the future, who owns it, and who will merely pay rent to use it?

30. Why Is This Corporatocracy Different from the Past?

An oil company can control energy. A bank can control credit. A television network can control part of the information environment. An AI company, however, may simultaneously operate in education, media, translation, programming, law, accounting, management, research, medicine, content production, and decision-making.

An AI company therefore does not merely dominate a single market. It may become part of society's cognitive infrastructure.

31. The AI Company as a Quasi-Public Institution

If hundreds of millions or billions of people depend on a small number of systems for access to knowledge and information, the company that owns the model becomes more than an ordinary firm. An internal corporate decision about algorithms, training data, access, price, filtering, language, or standards may affect the lives of millions of people.

Such a company may therefore function like public infrastructure while remaining privately owned. This is one of the central contradictions of AI capitalism. The Financial Times, citing two people familiar with the matter, has reported that Sam Altman and other executives proposed that 5 percent of the equity of major AI companies be placed in an institution modeled on the Alaska Permanent Fund. That fund, created from Alaska's oil revenues, distributes part of its income annually to state residents and also contributes to public finances. The proposed AI model is intended to allow American citizens to benefit directly from the growth of the AI industry.

32. From Financial Imperialism to Algorithmic Imperialism

The central hypothesis of this article can now be stated more directly. If twentieth-century imperialism is simplified as monopoly + finance capital + export of capital + markets + raw materials [14], a new stage may add further elements:

data monopoly + chip monopoly + compute monopoly + cloud monopoly + model monopoly + control of standards + ownership of knowledge.

For that reason, we may be witnessing the emergence of what this article calls "algorithmic imperialism."

33. A Proposed Definition of Algorithmic Imperialism

On the basis of the preceding discussion, algorithmic imperialism may be defined as a new stage or form of global capital concentration in which ownership and control of computational infrastructure, data, algorithms, AI models, and digital standards - in addition to financial and industrial capital - become instruments for exercising economic power and creating dependence among countries.

This definition should not be understood as implying the disappearance of older forms of imperialism. Oil, military power, banking, and natural resources remain important. Rather, a new layer - "algorithmic power" - is added to them.

34. The Seven Pillars of Algorithmic Imperialism

At least seven pillars can be proposed for this structure:

1. Control of chips - without advanced semiconductors, the development of advanced AI is extremely difficult.

2. Control of computing power - compute has become a strategic resource.

3. Control of cloud infrastructure - a large part of the digital economy rests on cloud systems.

4. Control of data - data are a key raw material for many new models.

5. Control of algorithms and models - a country that is only a consumer of foreign models gives up part of its technological autonomy.

6. Control of standards - the actor that sets standards need not own every company, but can influence the rules under which they operate.

7. Control of access to knowledge - this may become the most important feature of the next stage.

35. From Colonization of Territory to Colonization of Infrastructure

Under classical colonialism, territory was occupied. Under economic imperialism, markets and resources came under domination, while under financial imperialism, capital and credit became increasingly important. Under algorithmic imperialism, information and knowledge infrastructure may itself become a domain of dependency.

In other words, classical imperialism sought to control geography; algorithmic imperialism may seek to control the cognitive architecture of society.

36. Cognitive Dependence: A New Stage

Suppose a large share of education, translation, research, programming, consulting, legal analysis, financial analysis, and public decision-making is conducted through a small number of foreign models. The country still has its flag, government, military, and borders, but part of its production and processing of knowledge depends on infrastructure controlled abroad.

This can be called "cognitive dependence," and it may be one of the characteristics that distinguishes algorithmic imperialism from earlier forms of domination.

37. The Relationship between Ultra-Imperialism and AI

From this perspective, Kautsky's argument [15] also acquires a new meaning. A future empire may not necessarily be a single country. It may be a network composed of states + investment funds + technology companies + chip manufacturers + cloud providers + platforms.

Competition and cooperation within such a network can be tightly intertwined. The resulting structure might resemble a form of corporate-algorithmic ultra-imperialism. At the same time, differences of interest among states, corporations, and geopolitical blocs must not be ignored.

It is therefore still too early to speak, in a new version of Kautsky's theory, of a single unified world empire of capital.

38. The United States, China, and a New Form of Competition

The rise of AI has neither abolished geopolitical competition nor made the state irrelevant. On the contrary, chips, data centers, energy, intellectual property, supply chains, and technology export controls have become national-security issues.

In this sense, algorithmic capital does not replace the state; in many cases it becomes closely connected to it. Just as financial and industrial capital were combined with state power in classical theories of imperialism, we can now speak of the combination of state + financial capital + technology corporations + AI infrastructure.

39. Is AI Really a Stage "After Imperialism"?

Two propositions must be distinguished. The first is that artificial intelligence will end imperialism and create an entirely new system. There is not yet sufficient evidence for this claim.

The second is that AI is changing the instruments and structures of imperialism and monopoly capitalism. There is much more evidence for this proposition.

Under present conditions, it is therefore better not to say, "AI is the stage after imperialism." It is more accurate to say that AI may create the conditions for the emergence of a new form of imperialism: algorithmic imperialism.

40. Four Possible Futures

Four major scenarios can be derived from the literature reviewed in this article.

Scenario One - Algorithmic Capitalism: private ownership remains intact. AI increases productivity. Large corporations become more powerful. Human labor continues to exist, but the occupational structure changes. In the short term, this appears to be the most likely scenario.

Scenario Two - Technofeudalism: platforms become private territories. Rents derived from access to cloud infrastructure, networks, and markets become as important as profits from production [20].

Scenario Three - Algorithmic Imperialism: AI ownership becomes concentrated not only domestically but globally. Peripheral countries become dependent on the chips + cloud infrastructure + models + standards of core countries. AI then becomes a new instrument for reproducing center-periphery relations.

Scenario Four - Democratic Post-Capitalism: an important part of AI infrastructure becomes public, cooperative, non-profit, open source, or socially owned. Productivity gains are used to shorten working hours and improve welfare rather than simply increase returns on capital. Mason and Bastani, with important differences, point to the possibility of such a path [21, 22].

41. Which Future Is More Likely?

As of 2026, the available evidence points more toward concentrated algorithmic capitalism than toward the end of capitalism. Concentration in infrastructure, capital, chips, and cloud systems remains high [6, 7].

The early benefits of AI have also not been distributed equally across occupations and countries [9].

In the short term, therefore, there is little reason to expect technology automatically to dissolve the existing economic order. Technology generally develops first inside the prevailing structure of ownership.

42. But What about the Long Term?

In the longer term, the issue becomes more complex. If AI and robotics can perform a large share of both physical labor + cognitive labor, the traditional relationship between employment and income may come under pressure.

If people require employment in order to receive income while the economy increasingly requires less of their labor to produce goods and services, the structure of income distribution will have to change. At that point, basic income, social ownership, taxes on capital, public wealth funds, shorter working hours, and ownership of data will move from marginal debates to central economic questions.

43. The Main Contradiction of the New Era

In industrial capitalism, the classical contradiction was between labor and capital. That contradiction has not disappeared. But in the AI age another contradiction may be added: the contradiction between the social production of knowledge and the private ownership of knowledge infrastructure.

Billions of people produce data and content, develop language, create science, write software, and generate culture. Yet the instruments that convert this collective knowledge into computational and economic power may be owned by only a small number of corporations.

44. The Great Question of the Twenty-First Century

In the Industrial Revolution, the central question was: who owns the factory?

In the financial era, the question became: who controls capital?

In the digital era, it became: who controls the platform and the data?

In the AI era, the question becomes: who owns accumulated intelligence and the infrastructure that converts human knowledge into capital?

The answer to this question may determine the shape of the future economic system.

45. Conclusion

Artificial intelligence is not inherently socialist, inherently capitalist, or inherently imperialist. Technology operates within structures of ownership and power. If AI remains owned by a small number of companies, it may increase the concentration of wealth and power. If a few countries and firms control most chips, compute, cloud infrastructure, data, and models, the technological dependence of other countries will increase. If that

dependence expands from technology into knowledge and decision-making, society will confront a substantially new form of domination.

For this reason, the concept of algorithmic imperialism may be useful for analyzing the present stage. It is not a mechanical continuation of Lenin's theory, just as Varoufakis's technofeudalism or Couldry and Mejias's data colonialism are not simple reproductions of older theories. New conditions require new concepts.

By combining the historical line discussed in Davani's book [16] with the transformations examined here, the first path can be represented as follows:

With the development of the digital economy, another possible path can be projected:

This path is not inevitable. If social struggles succeed in broadening or socializing ownership in AI companies, a different possibility - a better life with AI - may emerge:

The final determinant of the future will therefore not simply be how intelligent machines become. The decisive questions will be who owns the machines, who controls the data, who controls compute, and who receives the enormous productivity gains created by these technologies.

From this perspective, the most important economic conflict of the twenty-first century may no longer be only over ownership of factories and banks, but also over ownership of data, computation, algorithms, and knowledge. It may be precisely at this point that the boundary between today's capitalism and tomorrow's economic system is formed.

An important consideration is that AI companies make extensive use of public infrastructure. This has contributed to proposals for public ownership of a portion of the shares in major AI companies. The central argument is that AI should not be treated solely as a private product belonging to the shareholders of technology firms, because an important share of its capacity and economic value rests on resources that society helped create: publicly funded and university research, public infrastructure, education systems, data generated by people, and consumer markets. It can therefore be argued that society should also share in ownership and economic returns.

The issue becomes more important if AI substantially increases productivity while replacing some jobs or reducing the wages of some groups. If all productivity gains accrue to the owners and investors of AI companies, the gap in wealth and economic power may widen sharply. By contrast, if part of the equity of these firms is assigned to a public fund or directly to citizens, society can also participate in the economic gains of the transformation.

Under this approach, when the government supports an AI company through investment, subsidies, major contracts, or infrastructure, it could receive an equity stake rather than relying only on taxation. The shares could be held in a public fund, with the returns used for education, workforce retraining, public services, or dividends to citizens. This idea also has critics. They argue that state ownership may weaken incentives for innovation, invite political interference in firms, and discourage private investment. It is also difficult to determine what share of AI-created value should properly belong to society. Even so, the core argument is straightforward: if AI is going to generate a large share of future wealth, and if society both helped create its foundations and bears its consequences, society need not remain merely a taxpayer or consumer of the technology; it can also hold a share of its ownership and economic benefits.

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Reference [23] examines a range of arenas of social and labor struggle around AI - from collective bargaining and copyright to data centers and AI governance.